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## II.—THE YOUNG MAN BETROTHED TO A STATUE

### ADDITIONAL NOTE

Through the kindness of Professor R. M. Mitchell, of Brown University, who has sent me his copy of *Venus in Rom*, I am now able to give an account of Wilibald Alexis's rendering of the story of Venus and the ring.<sup>1</sup> The material is handled very freely—*tant pis*. The scene is laid in the Rome of the Renaissance, where (as one of the characters says) “winkt uns das Alterthum lockend in seine Wunderwelt zurück.” The first half—the whole is a novelette of thirty thousand words—is very slow-moving. Hubert von Stein, a German nobleman, has come to Rome to visit his friend, Theodor Savelli; who has, however, mysteriously disappeared. There are glimpses of Roman social life, of a necromancer and hermit named Palumbus, of the beautiful Viola Gritti, of Savelli's half-deserted palace (with a broken statue which has injured the workmen who were removing it<sup>2</sup>), and even of Raphael painting in the Vatican. And there are violent thunder storms, strange meetings, dreams, visions, at night; a manifest attempt to create an atmosphere of the supernatural. The latter half is more lively. Savelli has appeared, half insane; he tells of a ball game on the day of his wedding, of putting the inconvenient ring on a Venus statue, of his consequent marriage with the goddess and fearful visits to the Venusberg. Hubert's wife Mathilde comes from Germany to find her husband . . . with

<sup>1</sup> Cf. these *Publications*, xxxiv (1919), p. 575, n. 2.

<sup>2</sup> This detail was perhaps remembered by Mérimée.

a Roman mistress, Faustine, and a baby. Enter Martin Luther. There is an attempt on Leo X's life, a street riot, in which Hubert, denounced as a heretic, defends himself for several pages single-handed against the mob, escapes by leaping into the Tiber, is rescued by his mistress (who dies defending him), and counter-rescued by his faithful spouse. At the end Savelli, still insane, regains his ring—not, however, through Palumbus's aid,—returns to his wife Viola, persuades her to drink poison, burns his palace after an elaborate funeral, and becomes a pilgrim. Palumbus dies. Mathilde and Hubert return to Germany, with little Guido, Faustine's son.

The *Venus in Rom* is certainly not an artistic success, though Heine was good enough to say that it belonged to the "poetisch geistreichste Produkte" of Wilibald Alexis. It has no life, no structure, very little coherence; it fails completely in that which it most strives for, the creation of a sense of the mysterious intermingling of Rome's ancient divinities with the men of the Renaissance.

I take this opportunity of making a few additions to the material already presented.—I find in Huet's *La légende de la statue de Vénus*<sup>3</sup> an interesting general discussion and a few bibliographical notes which I had missed.<sup>4</sup> The "deux idées fondamentales" of the legend—that the ancient Venus became a mediæval demon and that a statue animated by a demon could act as a human being—Huet treats at some length. His position appears to differ from mine mainly in that he rejects all general folk-lore material; and he is more confident than I can see

<sup>3</sup> *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, LXVIII (1913), pp. 193-217.

<sup>4</sup> The most important are these: the rather slight *Over eene novelle van Mérimée*, by A. Kluyver, in *De Gids*, 1893, 1, pp. 356-66; reference to a version of the Bachelor of Rome in the prose *Berinus*; and mention of d'Annunzio's *Pisanelle*.

reason for being that the legend had its origin at Rome in the tenth or eleventh century, *after* paganism had ceased to be a religious force.—Heine in his *Elementargeister* (1837) retells the story briefly from Kornmann's version, and mentions Del Rio and Wilibald Alexis.<sup>5</sup> It is curious to note that the latter's *novelle* was reprinted in 1831, and a few years thereafter appeared the similar stories of Heine, Gaudy, and Mérimée.<sup>6</sup>—The story is told again in the Prologue of d'Annunzio's *La Pisanelle*, which was produced in Paris in June 1913 (Huet, p. 196, n. 2).—To the references p. 534, n. 32 (that to Lucian should be *Amores*, 14-17) may be added Aelian, *Varia Historia*, ix, 39 (ed. Hercher, ii, p. 106), and Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii*, vi, 40 (ed. Kayser, i, p. 251); and cf. Philostratus, *Vitae Sophist.*, ii, 18 (ed. cit., ii, p. 101). The motif is salaciously parodied in Morlini's *Novella LXXXI*, *De tribus mulieribus quæ reperierunt pretiosam margaritam*.<sup>7</sup>—P. 558, three lines from bottom: the Latin verses printed on p. 559 are of course tetrameters.

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<sup>5</sup> Ed. Elster, iv, pp. 425 ff.

<sup>6</sup> In his unfinished *Romanzen vom Rosenkranz*, Clemens Brentano intended a section on *three rings*, among which possibly our story would have been represented. His note is as follows: "Den Ring der Mutter Gottes hatte Kosme, er ist durch das Anstecken an die Hand der Venus in den Venusberg gekommen; der Ring der Venus kam in seine Hand, durch ihn an die Mutter der Kinder, dann an Biondetten, von ihr an Rosablanca, deren Sinn dadurch verwirrt wird. Den Ring des Herodes besitzt Apone" (Clemens Brentano's *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Christian Brentano, Frankfurt aM, 1852, III, p. 463).

<sup>7</sup> Ed. Paris, 1855, p. 158. Cf. further F. Liebrecht, *Zur Volkskunde*, p. 139.